

IDENTIDAD Y SALUD MENTAL: A MODERATED MEDIATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY,
SELF-ESTEEM, AND INTERNALIZING SYMPTOMS AMONG LATINX HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS

By

MADISON L. RODRIGUEZ

(Under the Direction of Sycarah Fisher)

ABSTRACT

Latinx students report greater discrimination-related stress in comparison to White students, and this stress is positively associated with negative mental health outcomes. Ethnic identity and self-esteem have been important factors in the relationship between discrimination and mental health. However, there is little research on how dimensions of ethnic identity affect the mediating role of self-esteem in this relationship. The purpose of the present study was to examine if self-esteem mediated the effects of discrimination on symptoms of anxiety, as well as if dimensions of ethnic identity moderated the indirect effects of discrimination.

INDEX WORDS: ETHNIC IDENTITY, LATINX ADOLESCENTS, DISCRIMINATION

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MADISON L. RODRIGUEZ

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MADISON L. RODRIGUEZ

Major Professor:	Sycarah Fisher
Committee:	Chitra Pidaparti
	Edward Delgado-Romero

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Latinx population has been identified as the largest minority group (U.S. Census Data 2020), with Latinx youth making up 25% of the United States' K-12 students (Pew Research Center 2018). For this study, the terms “Latinx” and “Hispanic” will both be used interchangeably throughout to describe the focus population. Although “Hispanic” refers to individuals of Spanish-speaking origin countries and “Latinx” refers to individuals of Latin American descent regardless of their language, the population will be referenced based on what past literature used. This growing population experiences high rates of anxiety with 29% of individuals reporting symptoms (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). The development of mental health problems among this population is especially problematic given its rapid growth within the United States and due to the unfortunate fact that Latinx youth are less likely to receive the necessary mental health care in comparison to their White peers (Kim & Garcia, 2016). Thus, it is critical to identify factors that contribute to the mental health of this growing population.

Discrimination is one factor found to be a significant contributor to poor mental health outcomes in this population (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010; Ramos et al., 2021). For example, discrimination has been identified as a migration stressor that increases the risk of both depressive and anxiety symptoms for first-generation Latinx youth (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). While the relationship between discrimination and mental health outcomes is well-established (Lee & Ahn, 2012; Pascoe & Richman, 2009), researchers have just recently begun to examine constructs such as self-esteem (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007) and ethnic identity

(specifically ethnic exploration; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007) as potential explanations for the relationship between discrimination and mental health. Despite these noted links, studies have failed to examine both self-esteem and ethnic identity simultaneously and neglect the nuances of these constructs (i.e., ethnic affirmation vs ethnic exploration). Using the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) framework, the present study seeks to understand how self-esteem mediates the relationship between discrimination and anxiety symptoms and how dimensions of ethnic identity strengthen or weaken these relationships.

Theoretical Orientation

As adolescents undergo social and cognitive changes, they determine the meaning of their environments through their ethnic identity and being exposed to stressors like discrimination. This study utilizes the PVEST as a guiding framework to explain how discrimination can be a chronic stressor in which ethnic minority youth must find a stable coping mechanism, such as cultural/ethnic identity (Spencer et al., 1997). PVEST looks at integrating cultural factors into Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This theory is made up of five parts: risk contributors, stress engagement, reactive coping methods, stabilizing coping responses, and life stage outcomes. The model begins with risk contributors that influence one's self-system development, essentially what one thinks their peers think about them. This evaluative process is linked to stress engagement, such as social supports, environmental dangers, or problems in daily life. These stressful situations elicit a response, in which there are reactive coping responses and stable coping responses. Reactive coping responses can be maladaptive or adaptive solutions and are corrective problem-solving strategies, while stable coping responses are the integration of cultural goals in emergent identities. These coping responses are linked to behavioral or health

outcomes, whether adverse or productive. This framework has previously been used with ethnic minority adolescents to explain how discrimination has implications for future identity exploration (Constante et al., 2021). Ultimately, this study will use the PVEST frameworks to explain the importance of understanding how stressors (i.e., discrimination) in the environment can result in stable coping responses, such as one's identity formation (i.e., ethnic affirmation, ethnic exploration, self-esteem), and how it can lead to adverse behavioral and health outcomes (i.e., anxious symptoms).

Latinx Youth Experiences with Discrimination

Experiences and percentages of youth experiencing discrimination

Discrimination can be defined as negative treatment towards others influenced by prejudice of one's racial or ethnic background (Madubata et al., 2022). In the United States, Latinx youth are often on the receiving end of discriminatory treatment. Studies show that Latinx youth experience more discrimination from adults than their White and Asian counterparts and more discrimination from their peers than their White counterparts (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). Not only do Latinx youth experience higher rates of discrimination, but research also indicates that their experiences of discrimination increased over time. Specifically, in a study conducted by Benner & Graham (2011), Latinx adolescents' reports of discrimination increased across the first two years of their high school careers. These rates of discrimination continue in the lives of Latinx middle and late adolescents with 69 percent of Latinx youth reporting at least one experience of discrimination at ages 17 and 18 (Zeiders et al., 2021).

Discrimination and poor mental health outcomes

Discrimination is a major contributor to high levels of stress and poor mental health outcomes among Latinx youth (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). These high levels of stress for

Latinx students are positively associated with negative mental health outcomes, such as externalizing and internalizing symptoms (Bennett et al., 2020; Bravo et al., 2021; Hwang & Goto, 2008). Over time, an extensive literature has developed looking at the relationship between discrimination and internalizing symptoms for Latinx youth, such as anxious, depressive, and withdrawn symptoms (Cano et al., 2016; Lopez et al., 2016; Stein et al., 2019; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2011), and these relationships have been found cross-sectionally (Serpas, 2021) and longitudinally (Sirin et al., 2015).

The relationship between discrimination and mental health outcomes is especially prevalent among high school students (Lopez et al., 2016; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010; Ramos et al., 2021; Stein et al., 2019). Huynh (2012) reported that microaggressions are reported more frequently by Latinx youth and are associated with elevated levels of anxiety, which may increase feelings of depression. Research shows that these relationships can even start in middle school (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). Specifically, a study conducted by Stein et al., (2019) found that peer discrimination in middle school grades predicted greater anxiety symptoms in high school for Latinx adolescents. Considering prior research, it is imperative to further understand the relationship between discrimination and mental health outcomes for Latinx high school youth.

Self-Esteem as a Mediator

Discrimination has been found to be a significant predictor of adolescents' self-esteem (Greene et al., 2006). Self-esteem is defined as one's attitude about oneself, which is related to their personal beliefs about future outcomes, skills, and abilities (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). Broadly, self-esteem has also been found to be a significant mediator in the relationship between discrimination and internalizing symptoms in minoritized youth (Tynes et al., 2012). Despite this

fact, there has been limited research on the role of self-esteem as a mediator between discrimination and internalizing symptoms in the Latinx population. The limited research that has been conducted has focused mainly on adults and international populations rather than with Latinx youth in the United States. For instance, in Hispanic emerging adults, self-esteem has been shown to mediate the relationship between discrimination and internalizing symptoms (Cano et al., 2016). A study conducted by Urzua et al., (2019) found that for South American immigrants in Chile, the greater the discrimination, the lower one's self-esteem, and a greater presence of symptoms of anxiety. To my knowledge, there has been one study using self-esteem as a mediator with Latinx adolescents, which showed it to be negatively associated with perceived discrimination and positively associated with Latinx adolescents' depressive symptoms (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Previous research can only be considered a first step towards a more profound understanding of self-esteem as a mediator.

Ethnic Identity as a Moderator

Overall, ethnic identity is defined as how an individual views oneself to belong as a member in their group, as well as how significant it is for them to be a member of that group (Phinney, 1992a). Ethnic identity is multifaceted, but past research has focused on a two-factor model, which includes exploration and affirmation. Exploration refers to pursuing experiences and knowledge about one's ethnicity; this can look like immersing oneself through cultural events or learning cultural practices (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Affirmation refers to how one feels towards their membership in a group (Phinney, 1992b).

Although the development of a strong ethnic identity is considered positive, the research in this area is mixed. On one hand, ethnic identity has been found to be protective and fundamental in the development of minority adolescents and contributes to an overall positive

well-being (Neblett Jr. et al., 2012; Smith & Silva, 2011). For example, ethnic identity has been shown to buffer the negative mental health outcomes associated with racial discrimination for African American adolescents (Tynes et al., 2012). Additionally, existing research has shown that stronger ethnic identity has shown to protect youth from discrimination, which then fosters positive self-esteem (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Serrano-Villar & Calzada, 2016; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007).

On the contrary, findings from Yoo & Lee (2009) indicated that Asian Americans with high ethnic identity reported lower situational well-being when imagining multiple incidents of racial discrimination, which suggests that a high ethnic identity may exacerbate the negative relationship between frequent racial discrimination and well-being for Asian Americans. Another study found a similar finding for American Indian/Alaska Native and Latinx adults, in which high racial/ethnic identity exacerbated the relationship between racial discrimination and psychiatric disorders (Woo et al., 2019). Since the moderating role of ethnic identity has been shown to vary by race/ethnicity, this illustrates the need to understand the role of ethnic identity for Latinx youth. Further, the literature on the roles of ethnic identity development subconstructs — exploration and affirmation — is still unclear (Torres et al., 2011).

Ethnic Identity Exploration

Ethnic exploration has been found to have a connection to discrimination in past literature. For example, research suggests that Latinx youth who report higher levels of discrimination also report higher levels of exploration over time (Meca et al., 2020). Since researchers have recognized this association, there have been studies that find a relationship between discrimination, exploration, and negative mental health outcomes. This research suggests that ethnic identity is indirectly associated with depressive symptoms via a higher

number of discrimination experiences (Meca et al., 2020). As the literature has made this connection, researchers further explored how this may impact the well-being of Latinx youth. For example, researchers have found that Mexican youth who have not explored or committed to their ethnic identity may be more vulnerable to negative effects of discrimination on their negative affect, such as depressive symptoms or overall sense of self-worth (Romero et al., 2014). In light of these associations, it is conceivable that Latinx adolescents with low levels of ethnic identity exploration will be more at-risk for increased negative mental health outcomes.

Ethnic Identity Affirmation

Research shows ethnic identity affirmation increases during adolescence. For example, ethnic affirmation grows significantly over the high school years for Latinx boys and girls (Umaña-Taylor, 2009). In recognizing the increase of ethnic identity affirmation during adolescence, researchers have investigated the role it plays for adolescents. Past literature has shown that ethnic affirmation has protective effects on depressive symptoms for ethnic minority adolescents (Romero et al. 2014). Further, ethnic identity affirmation has been used as a moderator between other relationships, such as cultural stressors and involvement in risky behaviors; research has suggested that higher levels of affirmation minimize negative associations between cultural stressors and involvement in risky behaviors (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). For this reason, it is important to identify how ethnic affirmation plays a role in the relationship with other internalizing symptoms, such as anxiety.

Current Study

Past research has investigated the dimensions of ethnic identity and its role on the relationship between discrimination and internalizing symptoms. It has also explored this relationship in the Latinx population (Cano et al., 2016; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007).

However, this research is limited in regard to the Latinx adolescent population and requires further critical analysis. To our knowledge, no study has examined how both subconstructs of ethnic identity (e.g., exploration and affirmation) may impact the strength and direction of the relationship between discrimination and self-esteem, and ultimately, this impact on anxiety. The current study hopes to broaden this literature by examining whether self-esteem mediates the effect of discrimination on symptoms of anxiety and if ethnic exploration and affirmation moderate these indirect effects. Through this study, we seek to answer the following questions:

(a) Is the effect of discrimination on anxiety mediated by self-esteem among Latinx high school students? It is hypothesized that self-esteem will mediate the relationship between discrimination and anxiety symptoms in Latinx high school students. (b) Does this association differ by dimensions of ethnic identity? It is hypothesized that ethnic affirmation and exploration will moderate the relationship between the mediated pathways of discrimination, self-esteem, and anxiety symptoms in Latinx high school students, such that lower levels of exploration and affirmation will be associated with lower levels of self-esteem, thus leading to increased symptoms of anxiety when experiencing discrimination.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Sample & Procedure

The current data were retrieved from data collected as a part of a larger research study. A research team from a large midwestern university and county convened to create a survey instrument called the Coordinated Community Student Survey (C2S2). The initial deployment was in 2005. The C2S2 pilot study invited all students in grades fourth through twelfth to participate. Approximately 50% of students (about 12,000) provided written consent to participate. Students continued to fill out the C2S2 in the spring of each subsequent year for the following 9 years (2014). Research staff administered the surveys each year during school hours, via paper or Internet-based completion methods depending on the school. Cross-sectional data was selected from year two to year six of the project, specifically focusing on the Hispanic/Latinx student population who were enrolled in high school at the time. Data for individuals were de-identified and included the original items and scale scores relevant to this project. After narrowing down the participants to high school Latinx/Hispanic students, the sample used for this study consisted of 155 adolescents ranging from ages 13 to 18. Within this sample, 40.6% were females and 59.4% were males.

Measures

Demographic Variables. The demographics section asked participants to indicate their grade, gender, and ethnic/racial background (i.e., American Indian, African American, Asian, Hispanic, Multiracial, White and Other).

Discrimination. A singular item was used to assess discrimination among youth. The question used was “In the past year, how often did a kid at my school tease me about my race/ethnicity or

the color of my skin?” Participants responded on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 4 (*A Lot*). This item was selected from a measure that assessed for bullying and peer hostility at school. While this was based on a singular item, it is important to note that this item is similar to those used in previous studies to assess for experiences of racial discrimination in youth (Fisher et al., 2015, Zapolski et al., 2019).

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. The multigroup ethnic identity measure (Roberts et al. 1999) is a 12-item scale designed to measure two components of ethnic identity: exploration and affirmation. This is a revised version of Phinney’s (1992) original 14-item version. Items on the subscales used in the current study were rated on a four-point Likert scale, from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*). The reliability of the overall scale with the current study’s sample is .89.

Ethnic Identity Exploration. The exploration subscale score on the multigroup ethnic identity measure (Roberts et al. 1999) was used to define ethnic identity exploration. It is a six-item subscale designed to measure an individual’s exploration or confusion about their ethnicity. Items asked questions such as “In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.” The ethnic identity exploration subscale has an established reliability of .70. The reliability of this scale with the current study’s sample is .80.

Ethnic Identity Affirmation. The affirmation subscale score on the multigroup ethnic identity measure (Roberts et al. 1999) was used to define ethnic identity affirmation. It is a seven-item subscale designed to measure an individual’s commitment to their ethnicity. Items asked questions such as “I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.” The ethnic identity affirmation subscale has an established reliability of .84. The reliability of this scale with the current study’s sample is .86.

Anxiety. The anxiety scale is a 10-item modified version of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale, from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*). Item asked questions such as “I worried a lot” and “I felt nervous.” Items on the anxiety scale have a reliability of .91 with the current sample.

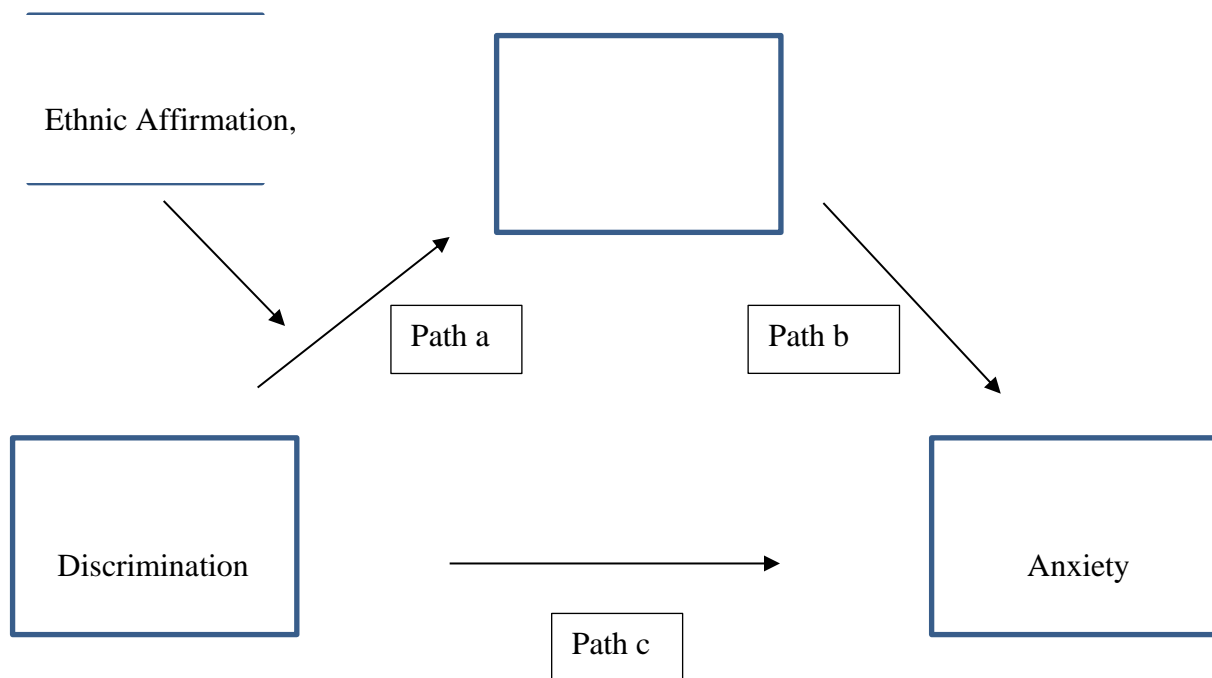
Self-Esteem. Self-esteem was measured using a modified version of State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES), which pulled eight items from the original scale (Heatherton & Polivy 1991). Youth reported how they evaluated themselves in the school setting and as an overall person during the time of this survey. The items were rated on a four-point Likert scale, from 1 (*Not At All Like Me*) to 4 (*A Lot Like Me*). The items asked questions such as “I think I am pretty good at figuring out problems at school” and “I like who I am.” This scale has an established reliability ranging from .82 to .89. The items on this subscale have a reliability of .85 with the current sample.

Data Analysis/Analytic Strategy

All preliminary analyses for the present study were conducted using IBM SPSS 27, specifically the descriptive analyses and frequencies were examined. Due to the embedded structure of the data collection design, the intraclass correlation (ICC) estimates were calculated to examine the variability attributed to the individual student compared to the school. The results of the ICC concluded no further analysis. To address the question of whether self-esteem significantly moderated the associations of discrimination with symptoms of anxiety, analyses were conducted with model 7 of the PROCESS SPSS macro as recommended by Hayes (2017). The PROCESS procedures use bootstrapping with 10,000 random samples generated from the observed covariance matrix to estimate bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (CIs) and significance values.

One moderated mediation model was tested using PROCESS SPSS with model 7. The moderated mediation model estimated the direct effect of discrimination on self-esteem, the direct effect of self-esteem on anxiety, and the indirect effect of discrimination on anxiety through self-esteem, as seen in Figure 1. The moderated mediation model tested ethnic identity, ethnic identity exploration, and ethnic identity affirmation as moderators between discrimination and self-esteem.

Figure 1. Moderated mediation model.



CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Our first research question examined whether the effect of discrimination on anxiety was mediated by self-esteem among Latinx high school students. The results indicated that the overall model was significant ($p < .01$), as seen in Table 1. Specifically, we found that self-esteem mediated the effect of discrimination on anxiety symptoms. When looking at path “a,” there was a significant negative relationship between discrimination ($\beta = -0.1041$; $p < .05$) and self-esteem, indicating that high levels of discrimination results in low levels of self-esteem. When examining the path “b,” there was a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and anxiety ($\beta = -.3195$; $p < .01$), meaning that low levels of self-esteem results in higher levels of anxiety symptoms. When examining the “c” path, results showed that discrimination had a significant direct positive effect on anxiety ($\beta = .1654$, $p < .01$), indicating that high levels of discrimination was associated with higher levels of anxiety.

The second research question focused on whether the association discussed above differed by the dimensions of ethnic identity, such as exploration and affirmation. To answer this question, we examined whether the mediated relationship between discrimination, self-esteem, and anxiety would be moderated by ethnic exploration, affirmation, and overall ethnic identity. The results show how ethnic exploration, affirmation, and overall ethnic identity moderate the path “a” between discrimination and self-esteem. There was a statistically significant relationship between discrimination and ethnic exploration ($\beta = .1617$; $p < .05$) on self-esteem. A closer look at the relationship finds that the interaction is significant at low and average levels of ethnic exploration [low: 95% CI .0096, .1435; average: 95% CI .0034, .0825] respectively. This significant interaction indicates that the self-esteem of this sample of Latinx high school students

with average or low levels of ethnic exploration are more significantly negatively impacted by discrimination. Lastly, the overall index of moderated mediation was also significant (index = -.0517, 95% CI -.1136, -.0028).

For ethnic affirmation, there was a statistically significant interaction between discrimination and affirmation ($\beta = .1298, p < .05$) on self-esteem. A closer look at this interaction finds it to be significant particularly at low and average levels of ethnic affirmation, respectively [low: 95% CI .0065, .1259; average: 95% CI .0018, .0678]. This indicates that the self-esteem of Latinx high school students with low and average levels of ethnic affirmation are significantly negatively impacted by discrimination. The overall index of moderated mediation was statistically significant (index = -.0415, 95% CI [-.1018, -.0003]).

Lastly, when looking at overall ethnic identity, we found an interaction between discrimination and overall ethnic identity ($\beta = .1651, p < .05$) on self-esteem. A closer look at this interaction finds it to be significant particularly at low and average, respectively [low: 95% CI .0088, .1439; average: 95% CI .0035, .0785]. This indicates that the self-esteem of Latinx high school students with low and average levels of ethnic identity are significantly negatively impacted by discrimination. The overall index of moderated mediation was statistically significant (index = -.0528, 95% CI [-.1257, -.0018]).

Table 1.

	Self Esteem			Anxiety		
	B	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P
Discrimination	-0.1041	0.5838	0***	0.1654	0.0551	0.0038**
Self-Esteem				-0.3195	0.0987	0.0015**
Exploration	0.1131	0.0455	0.0236**			
Disc*Exp	0.1617	0.0663	0.016**			
Sex	0.027	0.0975	0.7811	0.5596	0.1224	0***
Grade	0.0492	0.0568	0.3878	0.0616	0.0693	0.3798
R2	0.1249**					
	Indirect Effect					
	Effect	BootSE	LLCI	ULCI		
-1 SD	0.0702	0.0346	0.0096	0.1435		
M	0.0371	0.0207	0.0034	0.0825		
1 SD	0.0039	0.0185	-0.0334	0.0423		
	Index of Moderated Mediation					
	Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI		
Exploration	-0.0517	0.0288	-0.1136	-0.0028		
Affirmation	-0.0415	0.0266	-0.1018	-0.0003		
Ethnic Identity	-0.0528	0.0326	-0.1257	-0.0018		
<i>* p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001</i>						

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Discrimination can lead to poor mental health outcomes for Latinx youth (Lee & Ahn, 2012). Given the growth of this population, and the lower likelihood that they will receive mental health services, it is important to identify factors that explain and interrupt the relationship between discrimination and mental health (Kim & Garcia, 2016). Constructs such as self-esteem and ethnic identity have been examined as potential explanations for the relationship between discrimination and mental health outcomes (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Using the PVEST, research has previously demonstrated how discrimination has implications for the future identity exploration of ethnic minority individuals (Constante et al., 2020). While previous research has investigated the dimensions of ethnic identity and its role on the relationship between discrimination and internalizing symptoms, it requires further analysis within the Latinx adolescent population. The purpose of the present study was to expand the literature by examining if self-esteem mediates the effects of discrimination on symptoms of anxiety and if dimensions of ethnic identity moderate the indirect effects of discrimination for Latinx high school students.

The first research question explored whether the effect of discrimination on mental health was mediated by self-esteem among Latinx high school students. It was hypothesized that self-esteem would mediate this relationship between discrimination and anxiety symptoms. The results aligned with the initial hypothesis showing that there was a significant relationship between discrimination, self-esteem, and anxiety. There was a significant negative relationship between discrimination and self-esteem, indicating high levels of discrimination results in low levels of self-esteem. This aligns with past research in which perceived discrimination was a

highly significant predictor of low self-esteem and internalizing problems for Latinx adolescents (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007). Zeiders and colleagues (2013) also show ethnic discrimination to be an important predictor of changes in self-esteem growth across the high school years. Additionally, there was a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and anxiety meaning that low levels of self-esteem results in higher levels of anxiety symptoms. Overall, Latinx high school students with high levels of discrimination led to lower levels of self-esteem, which was then associated with higher levels of anxiety.

The second research question explored whether the relationship between discrimination, self-esteem, and anxiety differed by dimensions of ethnic identity. Lower levels of exploration and affirmation were found to be associated with lower levels of self-esteem and consequently, increased anxiety symptoms when Latinx adolescents experience discrimination. Specifically, the results showed that ethnic exploration moderated the relationship between the mediated pathways of discrimination, self-esteem, and anxiety in Latinx youth. This finding is similar to studies that indicated exploration positively predicted self-esteem which mediated the relationship between discrimination and internalizing symptoms, such as depression (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Thus, these relationships operate very similarly for anxiety and depression, which aligns with the findings of the current study. The findings of the current study indicate that students with average or low levels of exploration are more negatively impacted by discrimination, which in turn leads to lower self-esteem and higher anxiety levels. However, those with higher levels of exploration maintain high levels of self-esteem across low, average, and high levels of discrimination.

As described before, ethnic affirmation is how an individual feels towards their membership in a group (Phinney, 1992b). Ethnic affirmation also moderated the relationship

between the mediated pathways of discrimination, self-esteem, and anxiety in Latinx youth. Similarly, this significant relationship indicates that Latinx high school students with average or low levels of affirmation are more negatively impacted by discrimination on their self-esteem thus leading to an increase in anxiety symptoms. This aligns with the findings for Latinx students with higher levels of exploration demonstrating higher levels of self-esteem when they reported higher levels of online racial discrimination (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015). This similar relationship in Umaña-Taylor and colleagues showed the need in the study of these relationships related to ethnic affirmation for Latinx adolescents for the current study.

Lastly, total ethnic identity moderated the relationship between the mediated pathways of discrimination, self-esteem, and anxiety in Latinx youth. This indicated that Latinx high school students with average or low levels of ethnic identity demonstrate higher levels of anxiety across low and average levels of discrimination. This aligns with the Tynes and colleagues (2012) findings that demonstrated the effects of online racial discrimination were not evident for African American adolescents with higher levels of ethnic identity; however, those with low levels of ethnic identity experienced increased anxiety when exposed to high levels of online racial discrimination. These relationships function similarly for Latinx adolescents with higher levels of ethnic identity, which shows how central the development of ethnic identity is to the overall identity of minority adolescents.

Limitations

While the current findings offer valuable information regarding ethnic identity and its impact on the mental health of Latinx adolescents, there were some limitations within our study. One limitation is the use of a singular item for discrimination rather than a scale. However, previous studies have shown to use a similar approach when measuring discrimination in

minority adolescents (Fisher et al., 2015; Zapolski et al., 2019). Additionally, the data was collected from one geographic region in the United States meaning that the results are not generalizable to the entire U.S. adolescent population. Another limitation of this study is that we did not specify the students' nationality or include students with biracial identity in this sample. While Latinx adolescents have some similarities across subgroups, there are also several differences such as skin tone, appearance, or language spoken, which can also lead to differences in attitudes towards their ethnic ingroups and subgroups (Uhlmann et al., 2002). Finally, given the use of a secondary dataset, this study did not consider other factors that may impact the development of identity, such as school environment or family socialization. Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the literature by further identifying the relationship between discrimination, ethnic identity, and self-esteem with other internalizing symptoms other than depression and focusing on Latinx high school students.

Conclusions and Future Directions

In sum, discrimination greatly impacts the mental health of Latinx adolescents who have not explored or solidified their identity within their ethnic group. Since adolescence is an important time to discover oneself and pursue knowledge to contribute to one's identity, it is crucial for Latinx individuals to have the opportunity to explore their ethnic background and how they resonate with their ethnic group. Without this opportunity, Latinx youth are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of discrimination on their self-esteem, which then increases their anxiety symptoms.

Future research studies should examine the composition of Latinx in the geographical area to determine if this may be influencing the adolescents' ethnic identity development (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2002). For example, Latinx students attending predominately non-Latinx

populated schools, reported higher levels of ethnic identity than those attending predominately Latinx populated schools and schools with a balance of Latinx and non-Latinx students (Umaña-Taylor 2004). For Latinx students, it is also important to consider what other factors may be impacting the development of their ethnic identity. These factors can be school environment, acculturation, family ethnic socialization, and other various life experiences. For example, family ethnic socialization has been found to be directly associated with specific dimensions of ethnic identity (i.e., exploration and resolution); additionally, the association between family ethnic socialization and affirmation varied based on neighborhood characteristics and parental behaviors (Supple et al., 2006). Due to the findings from the current study, it is important to also consider the impact of acculturation since past research has found that higher levels of acculturation are associated with decreased feelings of belonging in one's ethnic group (Cuéllar et al., 1997). This demonstrates the importance of Latinx adolescents holding more positive feelings towards their ethnicity for their school performances. This indicates the need to consider the environment of the Latinx students during intervention planning and how this may also impact their ethnic identity.

The current findings show the benefits of promoting and developing the ethnic identity of Latinx adolescents. Mental health practitioners and school personnel should consider how they can build the ethnic identity of Latinx students, such as mentoring relationships and providing tools and opportunities for ethnic exploration through ethnic-racial identity prevention programs (Sánchez et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor, 2023). Additionally, this may be useful to provide in psychoeducational parenting groups with Latinx caregivers to illustrate how they can support the development of their Latinx children and how they are contributing to the resilience of their children.

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